



Gazillions

Gazillion: a made up number, mimicking billion and trillion, meaning really, really, really large. Also word starting with G.

In which

I try to summarise the whole of this study in one page.

Gazillions

The Artist formerly known as Prince⁴. The page formerly known as The Abstract.

This study explores the use and value of play in higher education; drawing data from primary sources (65 interview participants, 120 respondents from three surveys) and secondary sources (literature, empirical data, experiences, other materials and events). Its aims were to; extend knowledge of the ways in which play and playful learning are used in higher education across all disciplines; include a special focus on play in management education; and deepen and extend understanding of perceptions of value with regard to the adoption (or not) of play in different spheres.

Participants came from more than 20 countries, although the majority were from the UK. They provide extensive evidence of highly diverse and innovative ways to integrate play across all HE disciplines. Evidence indicates that playful learning is more widespread than recognised. They also suggest that familiar forms of play most associated with management education - games and simulations - are not the only kinds that can be, or are being, used. In addition, the study makes evident the permeability of boundaries between disciplines when it comes to play.

Sutton-Smith's Seven Rhetorics of Play are explored as a theoretical framework for considering how the value of play is expressed in HE. This sector is not something covered by Sutton-Smith in his original work. In addition, while all the Rhetorics are seen to relate to play in higher education in some form, this study identifies silences or gaps with regard to some of the forms, uses, and contexts of play in HE, which are also not mentioned by Sutton-Smith. As a result, I suggest that, while the Rhetorics provide a useful theoretical perspective on play in higher education, it is an incomplete one.

All participants agreed that play has value, although there were detailed and diverse views as to the form this takes. This divergence is reflected in the identification of what I term polarities of play. Play is seen to be extremely important as a means of teaching a subject, for myriad reasons. It is also seen as fundamental to creating good connections and relationships and for fostering a positive and conducive learning environment. These benefits notwithstanding, play in HE is sometimes tarnished by suspicions that it is frivolous, inappropriate for advanced study and undermines academic credibility. This study suggests that fear and negative perceptions about playful learning are its greatest obstacle. In closing, I make suggestions as to how to nurture a constructive culture for playful learning, summarise the headline messages of the study and propose eight principles to inform future thoughts in creating a framework for play in HE.